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SUBJECT: AN EXILE RETURNS: PIERROT RAJAONARIVELO ENTERS THE FRAY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: After seven years of exile in France, Mr. Pierrot RAJAONARIVELO returned to Madagascar on April 25, and is now poised to enter the political fray as alternative to TGV, Ravalomanana, and Ratsiraka. Mr. Rajaonarivelo is the National Secretary of AREMA, the political party of former president Didier Ratsiraka, and is among the most well-known Malagasy politicians exiled after the 2002 crisis. Vice-Prime Minister for Decentralization and Budget before his exile, he was sentenced to five years imprisonment for corruption and abuse of power. However, he retains widespread support on Madagascar's east coast, and attempted to run in the 2006 presidential election, but was banned from participation and from returning to the country. Rajaonarivelo will reveal more details about his intentions in a press conference later this week, but he will be an influential player in the coming months, whether he chooses to follow or challenge the transition government. END SUMMARY.

#### PIERROT RAJAONARIVELO IN THE GOVERNMENT

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12. (SBU) Pierrot Rajaonarivelo (born June 17, 1946 on Ile St. Marie) served presidents Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy as Ambassador to the United States for almost eight years, from 1989 to 1997. He was considered one of Ratsiraka's "promising young intellectuals", and upon Ratsiraka's return to power in 1997 he was appointed one of three Vice-Prime Ministers, in charge of decentralization and budget. Following the 2002 crisis and the rise of Marc Ravalomanana, he fled into exile in France, and was sentenced in absentia to five years of imprisonment for extortion, embezzlement and abuse of power.

#### THE AREMA PARTY (ALLIANCE FOR THE REBIRTH OF MADAGASCAR)

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13. (SBU) After his re-election in 1997, Didier Ratsiraka withdrew from the public leadership of AREMA, which he had founded 22 years prior, and named Rajaonarivelo (from his own ethnic group, the Betsimisaraka) as the party's new National Secretary. It later became clear that Ratsiraka had transferred power solely in order to comply with the legal requirements of his position as president, but Rajaonarivelo quickly began showing independence from the party's "founding father". In the 2001 presidential election, Rajaonarivelo actively sought the candidacy of AREMA, hinting that it was time for Ratsiraka to step aside for a new generation of political leaders - only to be disappointed when Ratsiraka decided to run again.

14. (SBU) The tension only increased as the election progressed. Facing dairy tycoon Marc Ravalomanana, AREMA's younger members preferred Rajaonarivelo, while the party's "dinosaurs" swore loyalty to Ratsiraka. Once the two leaders went into exile in 2002, the remaining party leadership split. The party's formal steering committee maintained loyalty to Ratsiraka, while supporters of Rajaonarivelo selected a "National Secretary ad Interim" to represent themselves. In 2006, Ratsiraka loyalists boycotted the presidential election, while Rajaonarivelo attempted to stage a comeback, but was not permitted to return. Faced with this intractable divide, a third faction formed: AREMA Matotra (Mature AREMA), headed by former Deputy Pierre RAHARIJAONA. Although they maintained ties with the AREMA family, Raharijaona led this new

group down a more practical path in support of Ravalomanana.

#### RAJAONARIVelo, RAJOELINA AND THE HAT

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15. (SBU) Rajaonarivelo is strongly rumored to be one of the main funding sources behind Andry Rajoelina's March coup, allegedly steering the movement from abroad in an attempt to pave the way for his own return. With Rajoelina now in power (in likely contravention of an understanding between the two at the beginning of the process), however, Rajaonarivelo has now distanced himself from TGV: in statements to the press, he has indicated that he considers the transition period to be too long, and the movement to be a coup with no respect for legality. However, in a joint communique with former Prime Minister Tantely ANDRIANARIVO (still in exile), Rajaonarivelo thanked Rajoelina and the High Transitional Authority (HAT) for having overthrown the Ravalomanana regime, and announced their imminent return and their wish to contribute to a "concerted transition." He also called for an open national reconciliation, and a general amnesty "of facts and acts" (not just a presidential pardon) for all of the political prisoners and exiles - which would enable him to run in the next presidential election.

16. (SBU) After several false starts in the last month, Rajaonarivelo returned on April 25. Indeed, his return has been rumored to be imminent since late January. His planned welcome event was cancelled, in the face of possible HAT opposition to his return, but two days after arrival he remains free, and has promised a press conference later this week. The HAT - which already has its hands full without additional players joining the field -- had stated a preference that exiles wait until after the June National Conference to return, admitting their concern that Rajaonarivelo and his fellow exiles may not simply fall in line.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Rajaonarivelo generally is seen as the most plausible challenger in the next presidential election, and AREMA stock has been rising in recent weeks as the HAT has flailed and failed, and as Ravalomanana's return remains quite improbable. Despite rumors of reconciliation with Ratsiraka, it appears that the two factions remain divided. However, Rajaonarivelo has eroded Ratsiraka's support base in Tamatave with his more active engagement from abroad over the last three years, and now represents the stronger (and younger) half. French government advice to Rajaonarivelo not to return to Madagascar at this unsettled time apparently had little impact.

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